

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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SP-02 AID-05 IO-14 SS-15 INR-10 /096 W  
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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0389  
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMCONSUL BELFAST

UNCLAS DUBLIN 01139

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: SPOP, EI  
SUBJECT: IRISH CATHOLIC CHURCH CHANGES POSITION ON  
CONTRACEPTION ISSUE

1. IN WHAT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS A CLOSE-TO-REVOLUTIONARY  
CHANGE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S POSITION HERE ON  
FAMILY-PLANNING/CONTRACEPTION, THE IRISH BISHOP'S  
CONFERENCE ISSUED A STATEMENT APRIL 4 WHICH, IN  
EFFECT, WITHDRAWS THE CHURCH'S OPPOSITION TO  
LEGALIZING THE SALE OF CONTRACEPTIVES IN THE  
REPUBLIC.

2. THE CAREFULLY WORDED STATEMENT STRONGLY  
CONDEMNS "ARTIFICIAL CONTRACEPTION" WHICH IT  
STATES IS "MORALLY WRONG" AND THUS PRECLUDED FOR  
CATHOLICS. HOWEVER, THE STATEMENT THEN ADDS: "IT  
DOES NOT NECESSARILY FOLLOW FROM THIS THAT THE  
STATE IS BOUND TO PROHIBIT THE DISTRIBUTION AND SALE  
OF CONTRACEPTIVES. THERE ARE MANY THINGS WHICH THE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH HOLDS TO BE MORALLY WRONG, BUT WHICH  
IT HAS NEVER SUGGESTED SHOULD BE PROHIBITED BY THE  
STATE."

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3. VARIOUS PROTESTANT LEADERS HAVE HAILED THE  
STATEMENT AS "AN HISTORIC BREAKTHROUGH," AND INDICATED  
THEIR BELIEF THAT IT ALSO PAVES THE WAY FOR REMOVING  
THE CONSTITUTIONAL BAN ON DIVORCE AND INITIATING A  
"MEANINGFUL DEBATE" ON IRISH POLITICAL UNITY.  
METHODIST LEADER DR. HEDLEY PLUNKETT, AS REPORTED BY  
THE PRESS, SAID THAT THE MOVE WOULD "HELP SHATTER THE

VIEW OF NORTHERN NON-CATHOLICS THAT THE SOUTH IS A  
"PRIEST RIDDEN" STATE."

4. THE BISHOPS' MOVE WILL MAKE HEALTH MINISTER HAUGHEY'S JOB OF FRAMING LEGISLATION ON THIS SENSITIVE ISSUE, PROMISED IN THE FIANNA FAIL ELECTION MANIFESTO, MUCH EASIER. THE BISHOPS, IN THEIR STATEMENT, INSISTED THAT ANY LEGISLATION SHOULD BE RATHER RESTRICTIVE, I.E. CONTRACEPTIVE DEVICES SHOULD NOT BE MADE AVAILABLE TO UNMARRIED PERSONS. HAUGHEY IS GENERALLY EXPECTED TO HEED THIS ADMONITION, BUT MOST OBSERVORS BELIEVE THE END RESULT WILL BE A FAIRLY PERMISSIVE ARRANGEMENT ON CONTRACEPTIVES. HEALTH BOARDS WILL PRESUMABLY BE GIVEN AUTHORITY TO DISPENSE CONTRACEPTIVES TO MARRIED PERSONS, AND THE DE FACTO FREE AVAILABILITY FOR ALL COMERS FROM VARIOUS PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS WILL LIKELY CONTINUE.

5. COMMENT: THE PRIMARY MOVING FORCE IN THIS NEW CHURCH ATTITUDE ON CONTRACEPTIVES UNDOUBTEDLY COMES FROM THE NEW ALL-IRELAND PRIMATE, ARCHBISHOP O'FIAICH, WHO HAS SIGNALLED A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE IN SEVERAL INTERVIEWS. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE NEW ATTITUDE WILL HAVE ANY INFLUENCE ON THE NORTHERN UNIONISTS. RENDAHL

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** CATHOLICS, POLICIES, BIRTH CONTROL, FAMILY PLANNING, RELIGIOUS GROUPS  
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